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ABSTRACT

While enrollment in Washington's 27 community colleges has risen from 74,363 in 1967 to nearly 160,000 in 1976, and full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment has grown 113 percent to 90,000, legislative funding of the community college system has not kept pace with increases in enrollment. In 1969-70, the community colleges received $1,093 in state and local funds for each FTE. Adjusting for inflation and the recent 75 percent enrollment increase in more expensive vocational programs, $1,686 per FTE was required in 1976, while only $1,356 was received. Further, Washington's funding level per student was $209 below the average of 14 other states. Three charts illustrating community college enrollment and funding problems in Washington are appended. (MHM)

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STATEMENT BY JOHN C. MUNDT

STATE DIRECTOR, WASHINGTON STATE BOARD

FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE EDUCATION

January 29, 1976

This is in the nature of a report to the people of the State of Washington about their community college system.

1. The people of the state, through their elected representatives (the governor and the legislature) have had genuine foresight in developing institutions of higher education in the State of Washington. We have fine universities and four-year colleges and one of the best community college systems in the country. In 1971, the Carnegie Commission listed Washington as one of the seven pace-setter states in community college education. Ninety percent of all students in higher educational institutions in the state of Washington are in tax-supported institutions. This is similar to other Western states--and is eloquent testimony of citizen support for higher education.

2. The growth of community college enrollments in our 27 community colleges has been steady and upward since the system was formed in 1967. In 1967 there were 74,363 students in community colleges; today there are nearly 160,000. Today our full-time equivalent students (FTE's), that mythical student taking 15 credits and on whom our funding is based, number about 90,000. This is a growth of more than 113 percent since 1967.

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Growth in vocational enrollments has been particularly gratifying. In 1967, 26.7 percent of our students were taking vocational programs. In 1974, this figure had risen to 46.9 percent, a jump of more than 75 percent. Today, 42 out of every 1000 Washington residents take some community college course. This is the hignest service level of any state in the country, even higher than California's 100 community colleges which serve 28 per 1000. Exhibit I attached shows the growth of service to people of this state.

3. The community colleges provide educational service to the many who desire postsecondary education but who for one reason or another cannot go away to college. They may not be able to afford it. They may have jobs they cannot leave and can only go part-time to a local community college. They may not have the grade point average to enter the university. To these citizens the community colleges offer an Open Door. Our colleges do not deny enrollment because of academic background or economic ability or age. A third of our students are over 35. Any person who can benefit from one of our programs can be admitted. For many, the community college represents the last opportunity--perhaps the only real opportunity--of continuing one's education beyond high school.

Community colleges offer comprehensive programs. Students can take courses for which credits are transferable to the universities and four-year colleges. They can take a full range of vocational programs, both preparatory vocational programs for the first job, and programs which upgrade the skills for those already in the job market.

Students from low income and median income families find a place in community colleges. Minority and disadvantaged students come to our campuses in great numbers.

Over 10 percent of our enrollments last year were non-white students, although non-white residents constituted only 7.3 percent of the total state population. Non-white students find a very congenial atmosphere on community college campuses. The community colleges truly serve broad portions of the public not previously served by other institutions of higher education.

But all of this service to the citizens of the state is jeopardized by funding levels which become more inadequate every year. The plain fact of the matter is that the community college system has grown faster than the legislature has funded it.

Exhibit II depicts the problem statistically and graphically. It shows what the trends have been over a period of years since 1969-70. You could pick any starting point and the trend would be the same. In 1969-70, the community colleges received $1093 in state and local funds for each full-time student. Adjusting this for inflation and the shift to more expensive vocational programs, we would today need $1686 per student. We receive $1356 per student, or $330 below the 1969-70 state and local level. This is only 80 percent of what is needed. This is an impossible situation.

It is true we can absorb some increase in cost through greater efficiency. Also, there are some economies of scale in a growing system. But we are far beyond these points. The colleges are turning students away, and generally the student most in need is the first to be turned away. We have long waiting lists. Some buildings stand vacant for lack of operating budgets. Maintenance of facilities is deferred. We are at a crisis stage.

There is another way of demonstrating the financial problem. Exhibit III compares the funding level per student in Washington's community college system to the average of other states.

We surveyed the other states, and 15 states provided data on a comparable basis. Exhibit III shows that our funding level per student was $209 per student below the average of the 14 other states.

To maintain last year's quality of service for increased enrollments (we are 7600 students more than the number used to calculate our appropriation) would require $7 million over current appropriations; to pay for inflation costs would require $3 million. At the very minimum we have a shortage of $10 million just to keep pace with last year alone.

Under these circumstances, any proposal to reduce our appropriation to pay for other state expenditures causes extreme consternation on the part of trustees from our 22 community college districts. The only place we can cut is in personnel. This would cause further reduction in programs and also cause more students to be turned away.

The Open Door policy is in jeopardy. On some campuses it is already closed. When we turn students away, chances are they cannot afford to seek education elsewhere. Chances are many will not qualify for jobs they seek and for which we could train them. The community colleges of this state are therefore facing a gloomy future insofar as being able to provide educational opportunity for the citizens of the state. This is not a happy picture.

Conclusion

In summary, the cornerstone of the community college system is in real jeopardy. The consequence is that the public policy of this state, viz. extending opportunity for postsecondary education, is being thwarted. Students are being turned away with no place else to go. They thus lose their opportunity to be trained, to become employable, and to contribute to our state through productivity and through tax payments. Bear in mind that we are dealing here with tax-paying adults of an average age of 28. We view the students who come through the Open Door as representing an investment the state makes today from which it reaps substantial dividends tomorrow.

I realize the legislative and executive branches of government are under constant pressure to appropriate money for worthwhile purposes. On the other hand, the community college system is deeply concerned about our deteriorating financial situation. We want to work the problem with the legislature and the Governor's office. The private sector and the public must also become involved.

EXHIBIT I

ENROLLMENTS COMMUNITY COLLEGE - FALL QUARTER

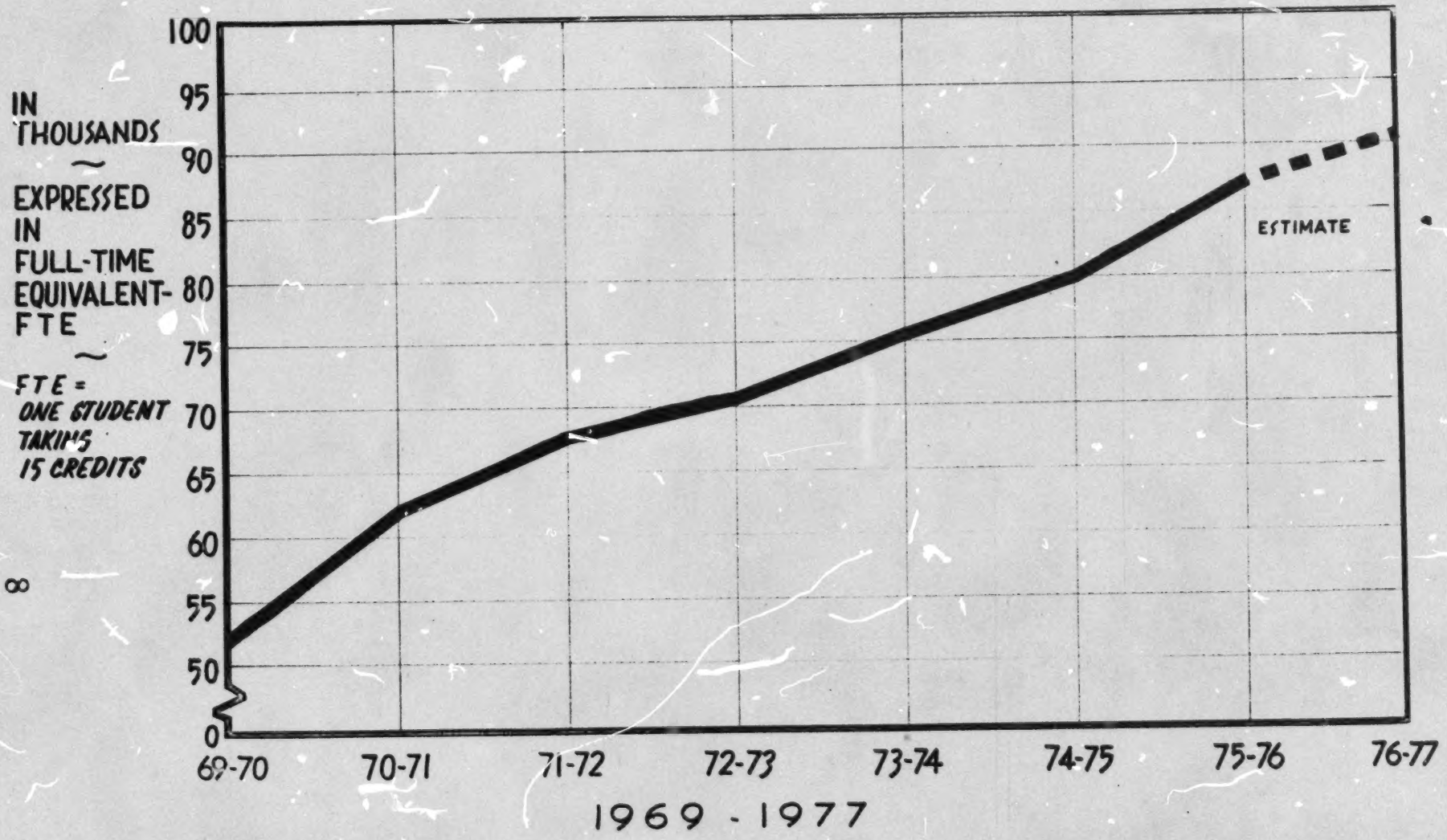

EXHIBIT II

FUNDING LEVEL COMPARED TO 1969-'70

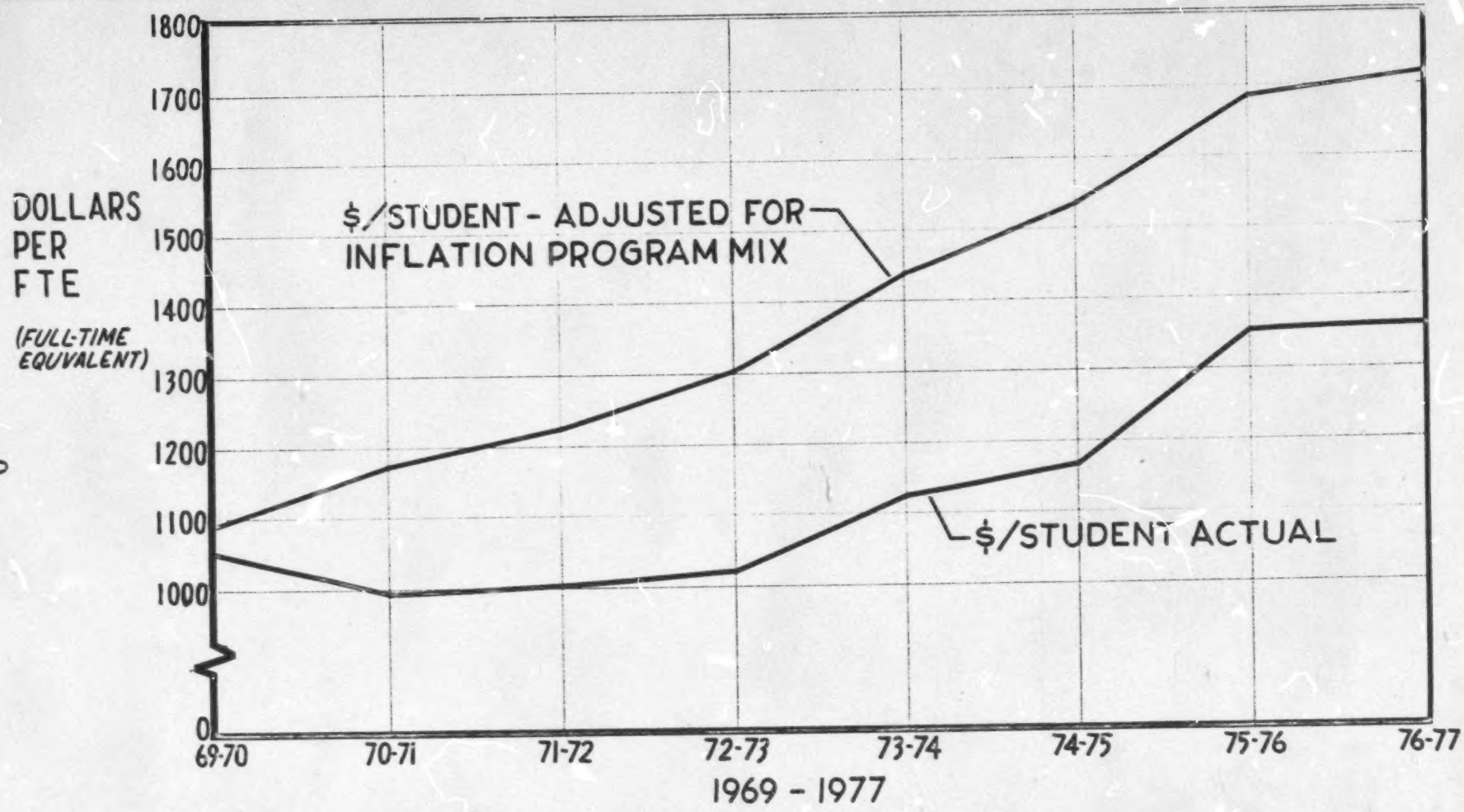

EXHIBIT III

BUDGETED STATE SUPPORT

PER FTE STUDENT (1974-75)